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## Court Widens Right to Claim Jobless Pay

By SCOTT HARRIS  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In a decision interpreted by some as a victory for "non-traditional families" and by others as a slap at the institution of marriage, a sharply divided Massachusetts Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that a woman who quit her job to relocate with a longtime companion was entitled to unemployment benefits.

At a time when the "family values" debate has emerged as a major issue in the presidential race, the court ruled, 4 to 3, that teacher Kathy Reep qualified for unemployment benefits although she and Robert Kurnit remained unmarried after 13 years of living together.

Advocates for unmarried couples, gay unions and other unconventional "family units" hailed the decision, one of several in recent years to extend legal protections to relationships not bound by blood, adoption or a marriage license.

"It's an important and courageous decision since so many of the families in this society are non-traditional that we need institutions to support families, no matter what they look like," said Mary Bonauto, a lawyer with Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, which had filed an amicus brief in the case.

In a vehement dissent, Justice Joseph R. Nolan called the ruling "mischievous public policy" and "another paragraph in the obituary of the concept of the traditional family."

Thomas F. Coleman, a family law lawyer in Los Angeles and president of EEO Seminars, a company that advises corporations on marital and sexual orientation discrimination issues, said the case may be a "helpful precedent" in California, where rulings remain "unclear."